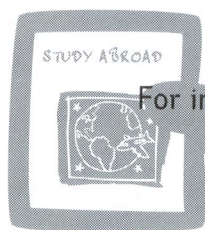




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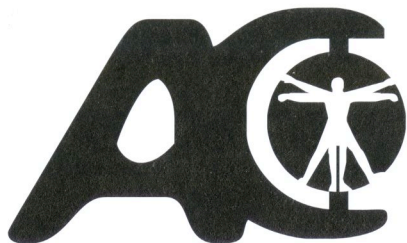
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The **Design Assisant** Chris Neal

The **Design Director** once again known as...Torrence Webster!

The **Auburn Circle** accepts works from students, staff and alumni of Auburn University. Prose, poetry, essays and articles should be typed. The **Auburn Circle** has access to IBM and Macintosh computers. It is preferred that artwork be submitted on slide, but originals are accepted. All original artwork remains in The **Auburn Circle** offices and is photographed to reduce risk of damage (all artwork will be returned upon request). We accomodate artwork of any size and shape. Original copies of photographs are required for submission. Collections of related works by artists or photographers are accepted for our Gallery section. All submissions become property of The **Auburn Circle** on a one-time printing basis, with reserved rights for possible reprinting of material at a later date.

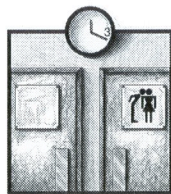
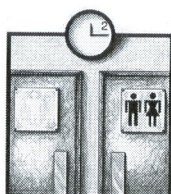
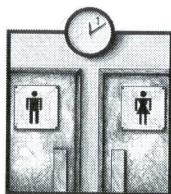
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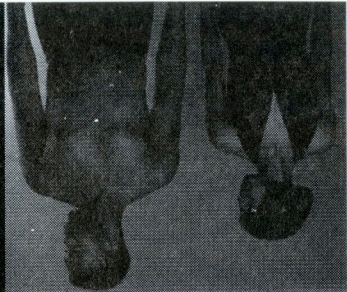
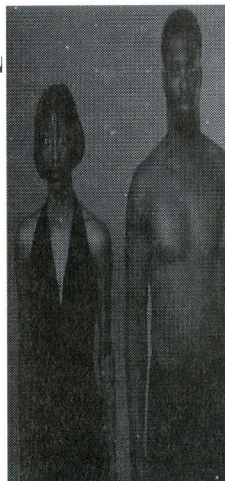
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EUSHEKA BARTLEY
LARRY MCCAIN



The Auburn Circle, financed by advertising and student activity fees, serves as a forum for writers and artists within the university community. It aims to appeal to a diverse audience by providing a variety of short stories, poetry, art, and photography. The Auburn Circle is published three times a year - fall, winter, and spring - with an average distribution of 4,000 copies. The views expressed throughout the issue are those of the artists, not necessarily those of the Auburn University Board of Student Communications, those companies advertising in *The Auburn Circle*, the editors and staff, Auburn University, or Auburn's administration and Board of Trustees. Auburn University 1996Fall issue.

It's the Thursday before our last staff meeting. We have one weekend to pretty much finish up the whole magazine, and I still haven't written my editorial. Instead I am on the phone to Tuscaloosa, trying to get a hold of the editor of the *Marr's Field Review*, the University of Alabama's equivalent of the *Auburn Circle*; so far I have failed to contact her twice and, as her secretary tells me, it doesn't look too good for me now.

"Thanks," I tell her and, once again leaving my number, I turn to Torrence, the design director, who is busy simultaneously doing the lay-out for the fall issue and singing a Prince song. "These people still haven't called me back," I tell him.

Torrence doesn't look up. "Well, Dan, man, maybe that's because they think you're a loser."

"Hey!" I retort, but there's no need to argue. Torrence is just joking. He may have an obnoxious and grating sense of humor sometimes, but he is an incredible graphic designer and he also knows exactly why I've been trying to call the University of Alabama. It's not because I'm one of those turn-coat Crimson Tide supporting Auburn students, nor is it because I'm a "loser." I'm on the phone because I know that the *Auburn Circle* is an important part of campus life and I'm ready to see it, along with the hard-working staff behind it and the talented students showcased in its pages, become big winners this year. I have never seen the *Marr's Field Review* before, but I believe it would be hard-pressed to compete with the quality of our publication. I had wanted to write my note about either how much better we were or how we could outdo them this year (in the offchance it were they who were better.)

But as I won't be able to write that editorial, I might as well mention that the *Auburn Circle* isn't merely setting its sights on an artistic victory over Alabama. No-- in our 22 years, we have consistently produced a magazine that prides itself in presenting the most talented artists, poets and writers on the Auburn University campus in a format comparable to larger, more acclaimed journals. While we were busy doing this, Tiger Football dominated the SEC and the *Auburn Plainsman* won award after award; we wanted the same success for ourselves.

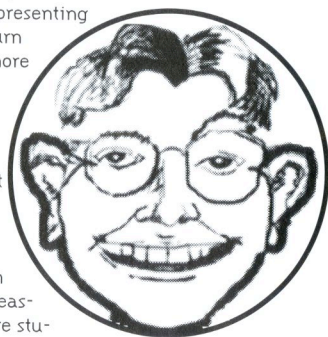
Guess what: it's time. We can be the highest honored student publication of our kind in the Southeast and we plan to be. With our newly hired Publicity Director Stacey Green in control, we expect to interact not only with Art and English students, but with the whole campus and local community as well as increasing student interest in our magazine. As more and more students pick up the magazine, they will also see the high quality of student work we print. This issue hosts outstanding work, and so will the rest. With publicity and quality working in our favor there is no reason we can't win as many awards as the great *Plainsman* or (dare I say it) be as challenging to the colleges of the Southeastern Conference as Auburn's football team.

All we need to do is get our name out there; that's our goal for this year. For now, though, we are just proud to present the first magazine of 1996-97. I hope you enjoy it as much as we did.

How does that sound, Torrence?

EDITOR'S

"The Boots"



TRAIN

trip

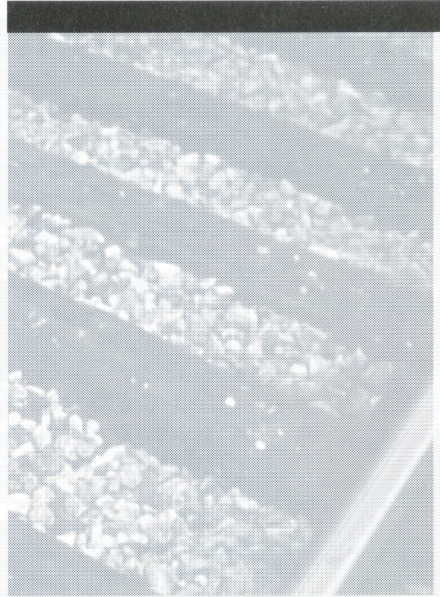
John McCleary

"Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me to my true self."

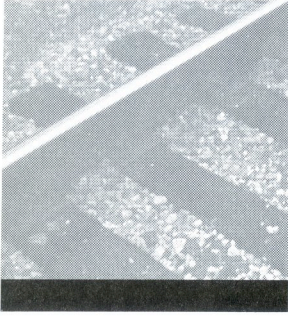
—Thich-Nhat Hahn

Train Trip— Mile 1

Far outside of town where
the hermits and drylanders
live, the train whistle
sounds as lonely as the
night it slices through.
They press faces to
rattly windows slightly
fogging their dusty
panes, creating the odor
of damp dirt, to keep
sun-like beacon lamp
rushing towards glowing
street lights on the
eastern horizon.
That light, perched
atop the iron knife types
through murky darkness,
a simple telegram, warning
coyotes, cars, and deaf
old men:
Get off the track or
fall dead to
sharp rocks and sheered
oak timbers.
And it rushes through
observing lives leaving
only vibrated metal
whining in a ghostly wind
carrying scents of
forgotten people,
forgotten animals,
forgotten places.



Mile 2



Yet there are those
who don't receive the
message or understand such
violent speech or didn't have the
time to stop for a quick glance and
soon a hooded conductor pays them
a raging visit, like the
stray dog that as a young
boy I found yelping in
last season's high weeds on
an early spring Saturday.
There it lay that greening
day on withered rocks with
hind legs broken
and strangely
thrown to side.
I tried to act a man,
offering it water and
compassion, but soon
found out how a man
should stand when my
grandfather brought his
gray tin cash box
to my mother's kitchen
and carefully fisted his
pistol, as he walked to
the metal snakes following
a bloody path the white animal
laid in an hour, dragging itself
to a nearby culvert for a grave.
My mother and I played
the radio so loud that the
speaker cracked and vibrated
but still could not phase out the clear, cold,
distinct,
"POP!"
and the stray went the way of those
who couldn't heed the whistle,
Just like the Indians
Just like the buffalo

Just like the young mother
who lost her babies to
a mighty crunch.
And they, with countless
others stand in
shadows of a rumbling
clickity clack screaming
horn that sings their
lament.

Mile 3

Up until two years ago, a wonderful woman named Audry Wilson lived down the street parallel to the tracks from my folks house, the one I grew up in. Her husband, Dudley, who died long before I lived, was a conductor for Santa Fe Railway Company which splits the small town of Olney Springs in two distinct halves, the North side and the South side. And the houses closest to these tracks are my parent's two story cedar roofed cinder and Audrey's white washed clear window house.

Audrey loved the trains that roared on that track, and for each train that shook the entire street, she stood at her door with one old sore veined hand gripping tightly the always polished brass door knob, and with her other, she waved madly for recognition by deafened and bold engineers racing towards the Pueblo rail yards. As far as I know, there has never been a time that the train engineers didn't salute her with two short Honk! Honks! before they reached the Clark Street intersection just past her lonely little house. Every day without exception, often five or six times, she would wave and smile at them, and they would toot their homage to her. It was like a contract she had with the railroad: they brightened her days and I'm sure she brightened theirs.

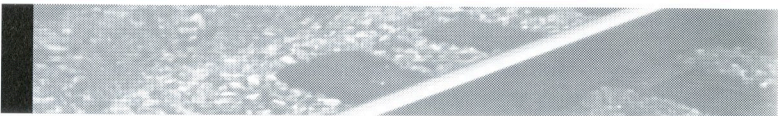
It took me a long time to understand why she put so much energy into saluting each train, and possibly to an outsider this whole tale sounds very ridiculous, but I realize now, as a young man making memories of his own, that she waved not only for the engineers, but

for her dead husband, her youth, and the memories of their life together while he worked the trains and she worked the house. In a way, I guess that's the reason why most people in my hometown wave to the trains as they rumble through, filled with coal for Chicago or stacked new cars for the cities out west. They remind us of something good—our life and memories in Olney Springs.

I remember all the great times in my parent's beautiful yard-picnics, family reunions and long summer visits, but all without fail were interrupted by the deafening rumble of at least one train. I remember my mother clasping her hands over her ears, or my father coyly flipping it the bird if the whistle was too overbearing, but always with a smile. A smile that needed no explanation over the rumbling thunder to make it understood they never minded too much.

Today, Audrey exists in a nursing home far from any tracks (quiet and peaceful) and my parents talk of moving out to a distant home that better suits aging bodies, but the trains do not change and push through day after day, like gentle earthquakes.

Mile 4



Oh train, some days when the sun shines with a western slant over the cedar roof to the base of the great walnut trees in his backyard, my father tells stories about his own childhood—a day before these fields about our dying town were deserted by progress in great irrigation projects and transportation of fruit from Florida, Texas, and California. As a young boy, he carried fruit—cherries and apples weighed and fed to your

freight car bellies. He speaks of when you heroed his brother Bob to War in Europe one direction, and his brother Jack to War in the Pacific, another direction.

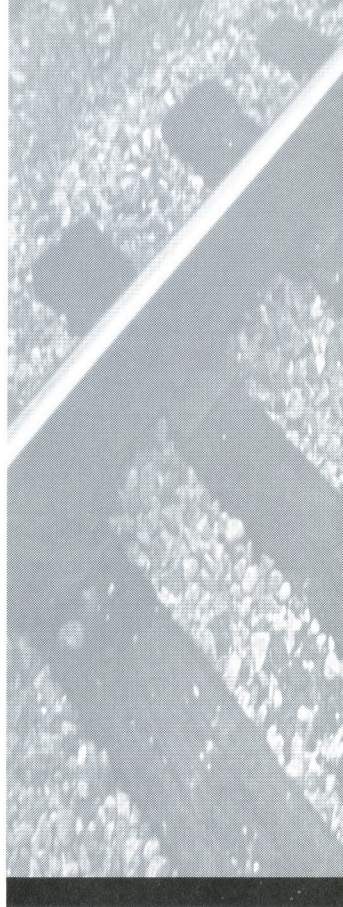
And they both came limping back home after you let them go. And now, as many people complain, you don't even stop in our little town anymore. Like some busy man on a business street, you just hurry through only caring enough to tuck the sickly town in a blanket of dust.

But dreams still exist, and every farm boy from Olney Springs to Ordway has put his ear to your rail or tapped the side shyly with the tip of work boot asking:

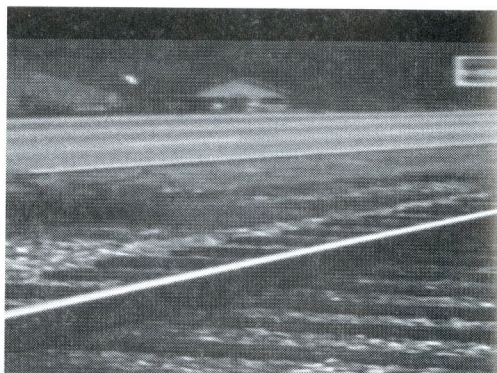
"Train tracks, train tracks where can you take me?" And as your lonely whistle shows that's anywhere they're willing to go, but in beds at night you only beckon them to dream a thousand places always content in orange sunsets and shadows of home.

Mile 5

Eric Braun is dead. We grew up together, his sister, Shelly and little brother Jason along with the other kids in town. I believe now that I loved

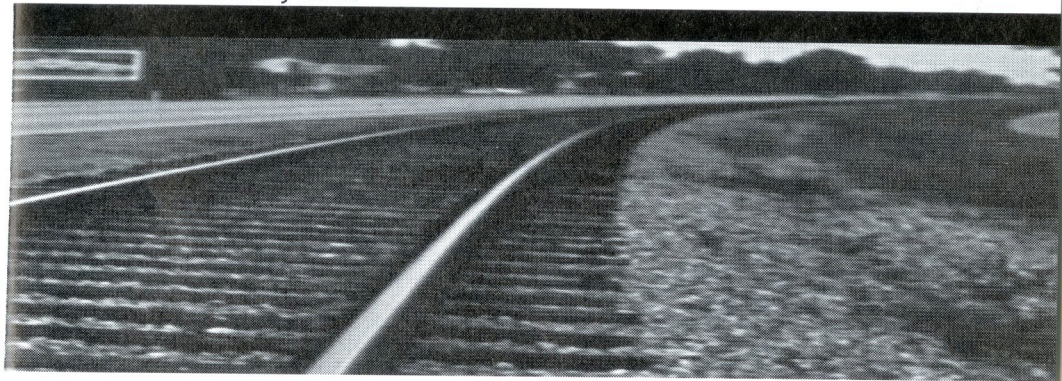


them all in one way or
another. Children living
out the last scrap of day
in front of the old school
or out beside the dirty
ballpark, straddling
our bikes, leaning heavy
on the bars to see
each other's faces in the dying
day, speaking of light
things before capture by
home summer prisons and
next morning's parole,
just after breakfast.
Things don't stay the same
but change like summer
to fall and boys to
men. Eric became
a man who fought in
a war, home to
Olney Springs, wishing
for a continual
summer of boyhood.
And one morning in a
late Colorado September,
winter surprised him,
descending despondency
that leaves one drunk
and bitter in the Columbine
Saloon by sunset. In chill
late fall night he left his
stool and strolled down
to street's end, through the
bushes, across the weeds and
lay between your two rails
leaving life behind with
the next train that came
from the West. His
handsome face pressed
to stone and wood, I
hope he dreamt of
young days swimming

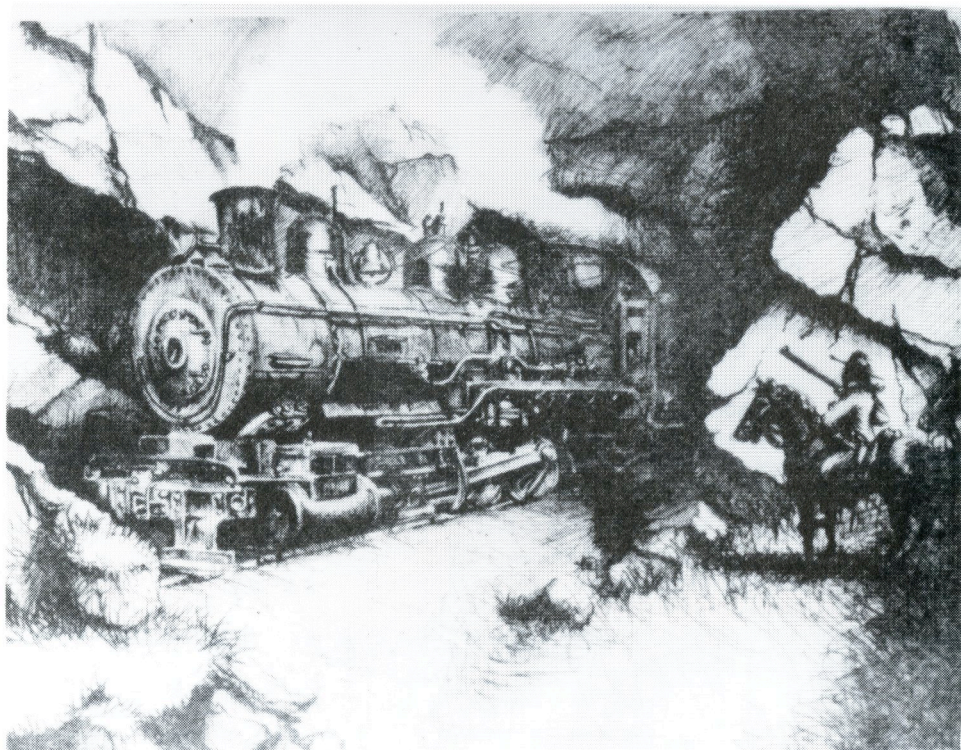


in the reservoir north
of town or football
games in backyards.

I now live 1500 miles
from the tracks that
haunt my memories
past— a sound mixed
with destruction and life
lightened by happiness.
But even in distance
as I dig my hole
in life's soft earth
a whistle sounds
over the shovel scrapping
soil to remind me
of seeded youth— a
tonal existence that floods
over the cemetery
down by the gravel pit on
Lane 8, never forgetting Eric
or my parents even under
wintery stone shaking in
a dusty land.



JOHN MCCLEARY has been published in *Genesis* magazine and is currently working on leaving school forever.



JESSE JAMES.JOSH SUMMERVILLE.print

Josh Summerville was born in Stamford, Connecticut, and moved to Nashville, Tennessee, at an early age. He attended school at Nashville before coming to school at Auburn. He also has work on page 29.

DIONYSUS

o f t h e
GROUND ROUND
I N G E B O R G K R A U S E

Pour me another, brother, tell me more
of the life you loved in lazy youth:
the juke-boxed, June-baby-blue
sailor days you wiled away
when wicked women ran in packs
and down your back, your black hair hung
in vine-like coils without a hint of gray.
Let's toast again, my friend, to frenzied days
when town to town you traveled, learning licks
from jazz men weathered brown and growing old
in smoky dives where lives and lies do time.
What kind of cold Athena cancelled you
and stopped your progress through the towns? The sound
of smoky licks was cruelly quenched
by what cold kiss, my fearless friend?
Where are the frenzied dancing women now?
You work from nine to five, like any guy,
and, after work, you drink and reminisce.

models for illustration are Michael Dean and Pete Johnson.

INGEBORG KRAUSE is a graduate in Comparative Physiognomy. Besides reading and writing she enjoys spending time with her five cats and welding sculptures out of auto parts.

BURIAL

AMY WELDON

A year after my husband Cletus was killed, Digger O'Dell tried to bury himself alive behind his gas station on Highway 431. I was there, standing right next to his wife Marva, the best friend I have in the world. Even though she didn't tell me outright, I knew Digger's store was in trouble. When he dug that hole and stepped inside, everybody else in the county knew it too.

A new BP had opened three miles closer to town and everybody thought it would make Digger close his store for good. Marva tried to convince him they should take early retirement and live with their son in Eufaula, but he refused. "I'm not going to roll over and let big business scratch my stomach," he said. "We are not moving."

Digger's real name was Cornelius. He got the nickname when he worked as a bulldozer operator after he and Marva

married and moved to Russell County forty years ago. When he got enough money to open the store, he quit, but the name stuck. Maybe it was because he was built like a rat terrier, short and stout and determined. Even after spending about thirty years behind the counter, in the cool air that smelled like cleaning fluid, the tops of his arms were still dark from working in the sun.

When Cletus was alive, he used to make jokes about us and the O'Dells living in a clump like moss on a rock, and how an eighteen-wheeler would kill us all at once if it ran off the road. Our house is next to Digger's store, and they live about fifty yards behind it. For twenty years, our house and their house and the store have made a triangle next to the highway. We had a key to the back door of the store so whenever Cletus



wanted a beer late at night or I needed some milk for our breakfast cereal, we could let ourselves in and leave Digger a note on the counter. Sometimes he charged us for these things. More often, he didn't.

Digger and Cletus had been good friends, probably because they thought they were the last two people on earth who believed in hard work and honoring the Lords Day. Every year at tax time they sat together at my dining room table, filling out forms and complaining about how hard it was for an honest man to earn a living. Every Sunday after church, they went fishing until dark. At Cletus' funeral, Digger had walked to the coffin and put a brand-new dragonfly lure in his hand. It rested between his fingers as if he were holding it, testing the weight and getting ready to thread it onto a line.

Cletus had been a machinery repairman. On a Monday last November, he was investigating a frozen roll bar on Ed Johnson's combine when it suddenly started to turn. It caught his jacket sleeve and pulled his arm into the machine. He bled to death on the stubble at the end of a row of corn, right where the combine had stopped. He had just turned sixty-five, the same age as Digger, three years ahead of me.

After Cletus died, Digger worked harder than usual at the store. He rearranged his shelves and painted a new sign to set by the road, but when some teenagers rode by one night and smashed it in with a baseball bat, he left it where it stood, crumpled and leaning to the side. He said the people who always came to the store knew where to find it, sign or no sign,

and those who couldn't find it weren't worth bothering with. I saw him once sitting on the steps of the store with a broom in his hand flicking it back and forth through the dirt in the parking lot and watching the highway.

The year Cletus died, all the cars that drove past my house seemed louder and shinier and faster to me, and all the faces who pulled up to the gas pumps looked unfamiliar. I think Digger felt the same way. People would stop to ask Digger for directions to someplace in town, someplace Cletus and I had known for years. They would thank Digger and pull away without buying anything. He would watch them pull away, looking as lost as they were.

Six months later, when Digger read in the paper that the BP was coming, he went outside and fixed his sign. He found a can of paint in his toolhouse and went over the letters in red. He opened the store at seven in the morning and stayed behind the counter until midnight. He ran specials on gas, lower than I'd ever seen him go,



even when Marva miscarried and he was trying to pay off her hospital bills. He dug up the bed of American Beauty roses Marva had ordered from the Jackson and Perkins catalog to build a coop for four hens and a rooster in his backyard. "People like fresh brown eggs for breakfast," he told Marva. "It reminds them of their childhood. I'm sorry to ruin your garden, honey, but this is the spot that gets the most sun."

From my bedroom window I saw Marva wrestling with the uprooted rose bushes. I went outside and helped her gather them up. "My mother raised roses like these, Dorothy," she said. "I want you to have them. You need something to take care of."

"Thank you," I said. "You can pick some whenever you want."

"I hope Cornelius knows what he's doing," Marva said. She never liked to call him Digger. I had heard her say it was vulgar.

"He's been running the store long enough to know what's best," I told her. Marva knew at least as much about the store as he did, but I wanted to reassure her.

"I guess you're right," Marva said. "Maybe people will start coming by now that he's got that new sign."

Marva started spending more time in the store than ever, sweeping aisles and stocking the wooden freezer cases with milk and cold Cokes. Digger had always hired a high-school boy to do chores like that, but now he and Marva and I had the store to ourselves. Since Cletus had died, I had been helping them, just to keep myself busy. Marva asked me once if I wanted some money for it, but I didn't. The Bible says it's not good for men to be alone. I think that goes for women too.

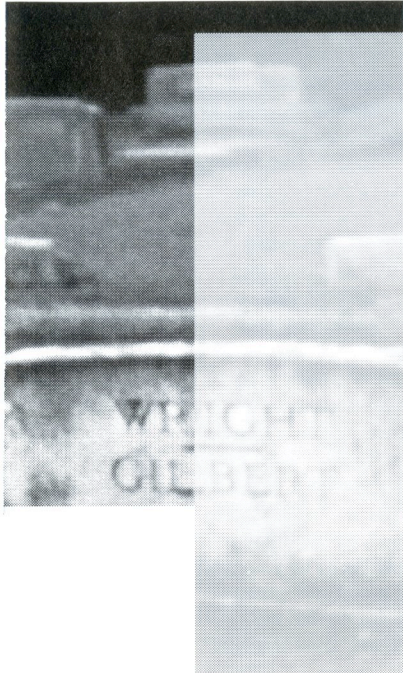
Every once in a while, Digger would look up from adding figures to watch Marva work, then rush out from behind the counter and take the boxes from her hands.



"Let me get those for you," he'd say. "They're too heavy for you." Marva let him do it. She said carrying those boxes made her tired. I wanted to be tired. I wanted to wear myself out so I would be too tired to think.

Ever since Cletus died, I had had trouble sleeping. I had gotten into the habit of sitting in his chair by the window, drinking hot chocolate and watching the highway until long after midnight. Marva had offered to sleep in the guest room for a week after the funeral so I wouldn't have to be alone, but I didn't want her to see me sitting up in the den every night, waiting like a bride for my husband to come back.

While I watched the highway, I prayed without ceasing, just as the Scripture lesson said every Sunday. I prayed for the mechanics



who worked on all the eighteen-wheelers going south to Florida. I prayed for the drivers of the smaller cars that whisked by my window much too fast. I prayed for the safety of everybody who worked around machines and I prayed they'd die in their beds when they were ninety-two, with their wives and families around them.

A few days after the BP finally opened in town, I began seeing the O'Dells' kitchen light on until one or two in the morning. Sometimes it was still burning when I went to bed. I could see Digger bent over a pile of papers, adding numbers, figuring up how much he had sold that

day. I could tell by the way he rested his forehead on his hand that it wasn't enough.

After a month, Marva told me she couldn't have our quilting club over to her house for brunch anymore. "I can't buy coffee cake for all those ladies," she said. She tried to laugh. "You know how Marjorie Milton likes to eat."

"I'll make a pound cake," I said. "Nobody has to know you didn't buy it at the store."

Two weeks later I saw Digger in Britton's Hardware buying a shovel. He looked tired, and he counted out the money at the register as if he were cutting off fingers one by one.

"Dorothy," he said, "I have something to show you. To show everybody. I want you to walk over to the store this Sunday afternoon and you'll see something truly amazing."

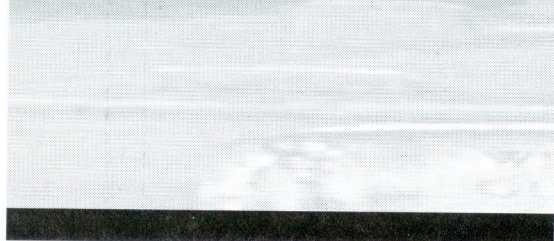
"Who died?" I asked, looking at the shovel. I was trying to joke. He looked like a gravedigger, even under the bright lights of the hardware store; he looked like the men who had lowered Cletus' coffin into the ground. His eyes had dark circles under them and he needed a shave.

"Truly amazing," he said, as if he were practicing a speech.

"Cornelius," I said, "we've never had secrets from each other."

"I can't tell you, Dorothy," he said. "Too much depends on the surprise."

When I got home from church on Sunday, my yard was full of cars and a crowd had gathered in front of the store. I didn't know where Digger had found all those people. I recognized some of the deer hunters who used to come to the store in the mornings. Teenagers were sitting on the hoods of their cars behind the gas pumps. Small ragged women from the trailer park down the road stood around the porch, bal-



ancing babies on their waists and cigarettes on their lips. The quilting club was standing in a little knot, watching Marva to see how she was taking it.

I walked through the crowd and stood next to her. "What's all this about?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. She looked ready to cry. "He wouldn't tell me."

Digger walked onto the front porch of the store and held up a shovel. "I'd like to thank everyone who heard the rumors and came out here," he said. "This is going to be the most exciting event in the history of Rehobeth, Alabama, better than the time old Stillwell jumped his mule over a seven-foot fence and better than the time Fitzpatrick's coon dogs ran a coyote all the way to Eufaula." He sounded like a carnival barker winding down at the end of a long day, trying to be enthusiastic but not expecting anyone to listen. "I'm going to bury myself alive."

Nobody spoke at first. I don't think they believed him. "This is really lame," I heard one of the teenage boys say behind me as people started muttering to each other. "I thought he was giving away a TV."

"If you'll follow me," Digger said, "you'll be the first to witness this historic event." People moved forward slowly, one by one, following just like people had followed the preacher and me to Cletus's grave.

Digger walked around the back of the store to a large shallow hole in the ground. I looked in and thought my heart was going to stop. There was a real coffin in the hole, with the lid propped open. I could see the white satin lining and the little pillow, just like the one I had arranged under Cletus' head. A few crumbs of red dirt had rolled inside, dark as blood clots against the white lining. There were little crinkled pockets around the edges, like the jewelry pockets in my suitcase. Looking at them made me feel cold inside. "Why do you need pockets in a coffin?" I heard somebody say behind me. "You can't take anything with you."

"Cornelius, do not do this!" Marva whispered to him. I thought she was going to fall over from the shock. "Where did you come up with this thing? How in God's name are you going to breathe?"

"I've taken care of all that, Marva," Digger said. "I've got a little PVC pipe right here, with a hole in the coffin lid to match. Jack Vance at the funeral parlor lent it to me for a few days. It's good publicity for both of us." He stepped carefully into the hole and set his feet on the white coffin liner. They made big red footprints.

"A few days!" Marva's voice got louder. "Publicity! Is that what this is? We're not that bad off, not like we would be if you ended up in this coffin for real!"

"I know what I'm doing," he said. "Now let go of

me. People are watching." He pulled his arm away and sat down in the coffin. People were crowding closer around us by now, and they almost bumped Marva into the hole. Jack Vance pushed past me and knelt down.

"You about ready, O'Dell?" he asked.

"Close it up!" Digger shouted, loud enough for the whole crowd to hear. "If any of you like, you can make a contribution. Just push the money down the breathing pipe. If anybody wants anything from the store, my wife will be happy to oblige."

Digger stretched himself out longwise and folded his hands across his chest. Looking at him in the coffin, I remembered how still Cletus' hands had been. Marva started to cry. "Cornelius..." she whispered.

Digger closed his eyes so he couldn't see her. Jack Vance closed the coffin lid over Digger's face and pushed a narrow white pipe through the hole. "Can you breathe okay?" he asked.

"Yes," Digger said. "Cover me up. I'm ready."

The pipe made Digger's voice



sound muffled and strange; it was like listening to a dead man talk. I remembered a story I had heard once about a millionaire who had been buried with a phone in his coffin so he could call for help if he wasn't really dead. I had remembered this story at Cletus' funeral too, and I had imagined his wife hearing her husband's voice on the phone in the middle of the night. More than anything, I had wanted to hear a voice like this coming from Cletus' grave, a sign that we had all made a mistake. I wanted to hear him awake down there in his coffin, calling for me.

Jack picked up the shovel and pushed the dirt over the coffin lid. The red pile of clay got bigger and bigger until all that was left was the small pipe sticking out of the ground like an artesian well. Jack pulled a ten-dollar bill out of his pocket, rolled it up, and pushed it down the tube. The pipe was wide enough for it to go down smoothly.

"See!" I heard Digger yell. I could tell he was trying to be loud enough for everyone to hear him. "That's our first customer already!"

"You should see what this is doing to Marva," I said to the pipe. "People are laughing."

"Yes, but they're dropping money too," Digger said.

Two teenage boys, the same ones that hung around the new BP on weekends, pushed past me and shoved a wad of one-

dollar bills down the hole. "He's fuckin' crazy, man," one of them said.

"Watch your language," I told him. "Mr. O'Dell deserves some respect."

Some of the hunters came up to the grave, and the quilting club ladies too. They patted Marva on the back and took new twenty-dollar bills carefully out of their wallets. Elsie Tatum's little grandson dropped a quarter down the pipe. "Do I get to make a wish?" he asked.

"Don't wish," Marva said, looking at the pipe. "Pray."

Digger's friends, the ones standing closest to the grave, looked at the fresh dirt, then up at Marva and back again. I wished Digger could have seen their faces. They didn't look impressed, or even scared. They looked like Cletus' old friends had looked when they gathered around his grave, trying to think of something to say to me and knowing nothing would sound right. They shoved their money down the tube and hurried to their cars as if they were leaving an indecent movie, something they wished they hadn't seen. All the strangers stayed around, and more kept coming. To them, it was a sideshow. They didn't seem to mind the sound of Digger's harsh breathing through the pipe.

Eventually, Marva went inside to wait on them. It was a hot day, and everybody wanted cold Cokes and lemonade. I went in to help her. A car full of people I didn't know, people from town, pulled up next to the gas pumps. "Is this where the man's buried alive?" I

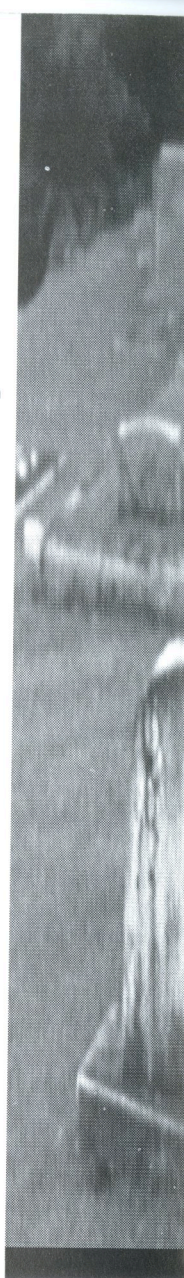
heard a child ask. "Yep," Dillon Jamison said. Dillon lost the county commissioner's race three years ago, and he's been looking for something to be in charge of ever since. "Digger O'Dell, the living corpse. Right around the back. Five dollars, please."

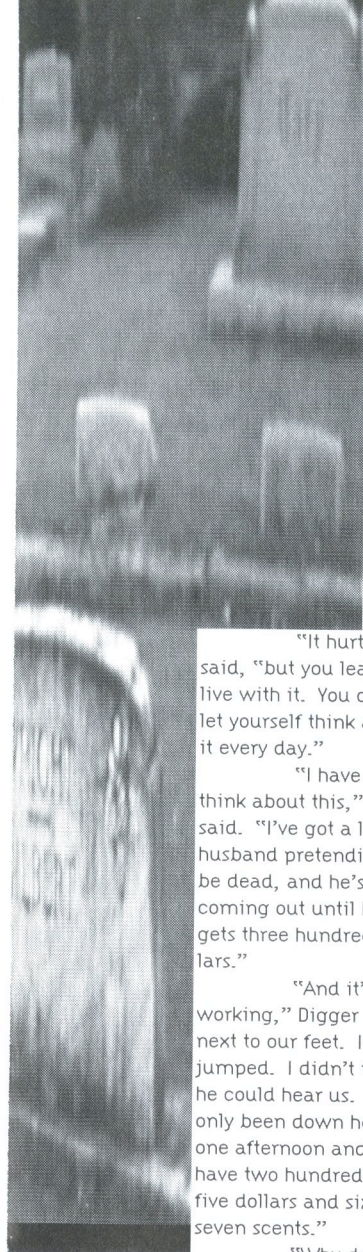
Marva and I went outside after everyone had left that evening. Coke bottles, candy wrappers, and cigarette butts were scattered all over the ground. "People don't have the decency to pick up their trash," I said.

"Let's pick it up," Marva said. "Cornelius always kept his store clean."

After we cleaned up the store's parking lot and locked the door, Marva and I walked back to the grave. The sun was setting in smears of red and orange and we could hear Digger breathing through his pipe from where we stood, five feet away. He sounded raspy and uncertain, like my grandson playing with his snorkel in the YMCA swimming pool.

"Dorothy," Marva asked, "What's it like to lose a husband?" She put her hand gently over the pipe to feel Digger's breath moving in and out.





"It hurts," I said, "but you learn to live with it. You can't let yourself think about it every day."

"I have to think about this," she said. "I've got a live husband pretending to be dead, and he's not coming out until he gets three hundred dollars."

"And it's working," Digger said next to our feet. I jumped. I didn't think he could hear us. "I've only been down here for one afternoon and I have two hundred and five dollars and sixty-seven scents."

"Why don't you let me dig you up?" Marva asked. Then you could stay in the house with me tonight and go back in

the ground tomorrow."

"That wouldn't be fair," Digger said.

"But everybody's gone now," I said to the pipe. I felt strange talking to a hole in the ground, listening to a voice without a body. "The novelty's worn off, and there won't be as many people here tomorrow. Maybe nobody will come. And anyway, Digger, three hundred dollars won't save you."

"People can't resist something like this," Digger said. "They'll come back."

"Aren't you scared?" Marva asked.

"No," Digger said. "I've got a flashlight and a water bottle, and I put a Bible in my pocket before I got in. It's kind of nice. I never had this much time to think."

"The Bible?" Marva asked. "Down there?"

"Gives a whole new meaning to the places where it talks about death," Digger said. "It wouldn't be a bad idea for Reverend Spruell to do a little time in this hole. Then he would know what he's talking about."

"I can go to work," Marva said. She picked up a nickel someone had dropped next to the pipe and put it in her pocket. "Or we could retire and collect Social Security. We're more than old enough."

"I'm not taking government money for sitting on my ass all day," Digger said. "And I want people to remember me, Digger O'Dell, the living corpse. That's catchy, that name Dillon came up with. It sticks in people's heads. They'll come back."

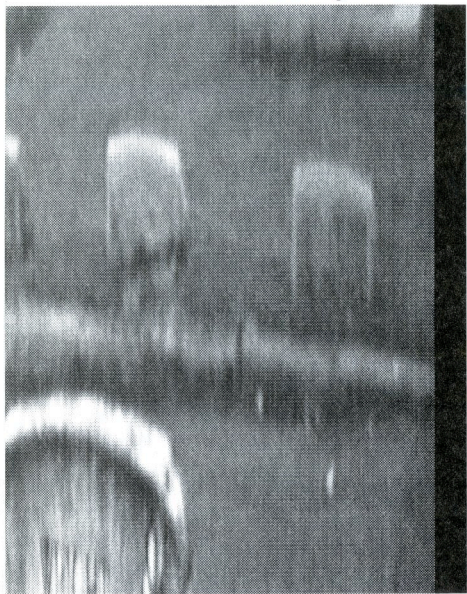
Everything about the burial behind the store reminded me of Cletus' funeral, the people walking around acting like they had a reason for being there, the red pile of dirt, and the voice of his best friend coming from the ground. When I went to the cemetery every week to visit Cletus' grave, I wondered if he knew I was there. I wondered if he

could hear my voice, or feel how much I wanted him back. I wondered if he liked the flowers I left, and if the ground felt colder at night.

I walked around the pipe and stood directly on top of the grave. "Digger," I said down the tube, "can you feel me standing here?"

"I can hear your voice," Digger said, "and the ground is giving just a little. I can tell you're there."

I thought about tomorrow, when the people would return to the store and crowd around Digger's grave again. I imagined Digger stepping out of the coffin and brushing crumbs of red clay off his shoulders, and turning to look at the crowd, wondering why none of the faces looked the same. I knew that when I visited the cemetery next week, I would stand on top of Cletus' grave as I had done with his best friend's imagining the coffin lid bending under my weight and under the weight of a year of earth and rain, waiting to hear the voice of a living man about to rise from the dead.



AMY WELDON graduated from Auburn University in the Spring. She plans on going to graduate school but doesn't know where and couldn't come up with anything interesting to say in this biography. Even though it's a big enough umbrella, Amy always ends up getting wet.

ETERNITY

NANCY L. NAUGLE

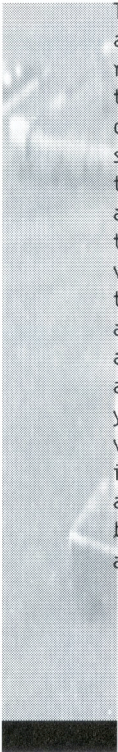
Bury me in that yellow
dress
and I will remain a pretty girl of twelve forever.
Sheer sleeves, puffy and white.
Tiny pink flowers
that became pulled and frayed
when I didn't want to be
a girl in that dress.
Perfect, smooth yellow fabric
that was never meant to wrinkle.
Only it did.
I could never move in that dress.
It was not designed for a girl to move in.
It was created and bought and placed over my head
for a girl to remain stationary and confined.
"Oh, what a pretty picture."
I know I was given shoes especially for that dress.
I don't remember them now.
But I can still see the big, ruffled sleeves
and feel the narrow, elastic bands constricting my wrists.
I can feel the dress as it is slipped over my head
and zipped up for me.
"Sit still. Don't fidget."
A long zipper that took a long time to end,
and then I was perfectly zipped in that yellow dress.
A pretty dress for a pretty girl.
My sisters never had a dress like that one.
My sisters never had my eyes, or my hair, or my skin,
or my thoughts of death and being buried in that yellow
dress.
Close the lid and remain a pretty girl of twelve forever.
Eternally confined.



NANCY NAUGLE is a graduate student in the English Department whose specialty area is Women's Studies.


Le Vieux

C a r r e
A D R I E N N E M A T T E A



The aroma of sweat
and liqueur of the breath
no rhyming for reason
that entertains death
children in black donning
silver galore
the vendor, a singer, me
and a whore
they're wicked and wise
with a facial disguise
that chokes off the air
and sees with clear eyes
all's sullen and keen
and deceptively mean
yet ancient and old
with stories untold
it's tight and it's cramped
and nothing's for free
but a song, a balloon,
and possibly me.

ADRIENNE MATTEA spent a year at Auburn, but is currently a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin where she's eagerly studying English and Geology. She hopes to eventually write many poems about rocks.



IT HAPPENED ONE DAY IN THE COUNTY OF PRACK SHANE YANCEY

It happened one day in the county of Prack,
that his mom went away and didn't come back.
It's not like she said she was going away
In fact she had planned to return the same day.
So he watched and he waited, he waited and watched.
He hemmed and he hawed, he swandled and swatched.
He paced and he worried a hole in the floor,
with one eye on clock and one eye on door.

The cops were called out to scour the road.
His family called in to lighten his load.
They sent him to bed and promised his mind
that when he awoke it all would be fine.
He knew that his sister would need her big brother,
though it hurt him because she looked like his mother.
But knowing his job he gave her a hug
then tucked her in bed and made her all snug.
He promised her that the morning would show
that mommie was home, and the cops would all go.
With that he himself went to get in his bed,
and prayed silent prayers to God in his head.

His dad woke him up and he could tell pop was crying,
and he could tell that inside the big guy was dying.
They both hurt inside so they both held each other,
one missed his wife and one missed his mother.
The eleven year princess heard them awake.
He saw her run to the door, then he saw her lip shake.
He couldn't even take a look in her eyes,
'cause mom wasn't home and he'd apparently lied.
And although she knew she asked through her tears
"Is Mommy home?" to confirm her worst fears.
Looking away at a spot on the wall
He told her "no" and watched her hopes fall.

Then the fun began as he sat home and waited

His dad was distraught and his grandma sedated.
The family all stumbled around in a daze
and listened to sobs of his Aunt Malataze.
Then after three days and a good many cries,
and meat plates and fruit plates and mulberry pies,
the cops said they'd found her wandering alone.
So dad and some others went to gather her home.
They hopped on a plane and got there that night.
It all was okay; it all was all right.
So he thanked the good Lord that his mom had been
found.
'cause he missed her mom smells and he missed her
mom sounds.

Well the plane was scheduled to come in at eight,
but small planes have troubles and are quite often
late.

The big hand on twelve the little on ten,
and still no news that his parents were in.
He heard a small cry from his gran in her room,
so he ran in to see her and he heard a kaboom!

On the tube was a plane all blazing and red
and he knew at that instant that his parents were
dead.

The news didn't know that he hadn't heard
and to find out that way was really absurd.
He watched the whole story in absolute quiet.
His gran had turned white and his sis' didn't buy it.

Then some silly worker at Sulygysud
must have opened the dam 'cause it started a flood
of calls from all over the county of Prack,
'cause they all loved his parents and they all wanted
them back.

Then the Boffils and the Hoggles and Hosenpofs too
all came to the door needing something to do.
To make them feel needed or to hold back their pain,
but it continued to fall on their heads like the rain.
At three in the morning when they were finally alone
and all the well-wishers had finally gone home,
His praises to God became loud screams of rage,
and all his doubts burst out of their cage;
"God you're not real! God you're not mine!
God you don't care! God not this time!"
He slept with those cries still fresh in his head,

and he still had his doubts when he got out of bed.
He stumbled and bumbled and fumbled around
with no sense of purpose
until he heard a small sound
His princess was crying but she wasn't awake.
He went to get Mom then he caught his mistake.
So he wiped all the tears as they ran down her eyes
and had first of many of his healing up cries.
She awoke and he tried to help one more time
but he'd lost all his words, he'd lost all his rhyme.
His princess as well seemed to trip on the word
that would heal all their hurts or so they had heard.
They held on to each other throughout that whole day
and through the next week and on into May.
They rebuilt their young lives as they held their young hands
and ever so slowly they learned how to stand
without their Dad's fingers to snap out the time
or without their mom's voice to sing out the rhyme, almost.



SHANE YANCEY'S first name is John. He apparently writes poetry and has an unlisted phone number. When he evaded our sources we sent our crack investigating team out to find him. We discovered that his house had been stolen... or something.

ZEITGEIST

C L A Y G I L B E R T

I reach out, touch you with a kind word, or a joke
Or even with a smile
And intimacy is so easy
Here where there is only the semblance of you
The flashing cursor indicates your vitality from behind
The unseen ether which compresses our voices
Into words typed on a screen.

This is not fantasy
Not completely; the words are yours,
And the thoughts they indicate
Yet to me you are
A text that scrolls against
A captured sky of synthetic blue;
Your surface your only meaning.

I can make you anything in my mind
Until the truth— or truer-seeming—
Of your flesh interrupts the process of mirage;
Until you stubbornly interpose the fluid paradox
Between the flawless cipher of my imaginings
And the hot and ragged magnetism
Of your every divergence from the template of my
desire.

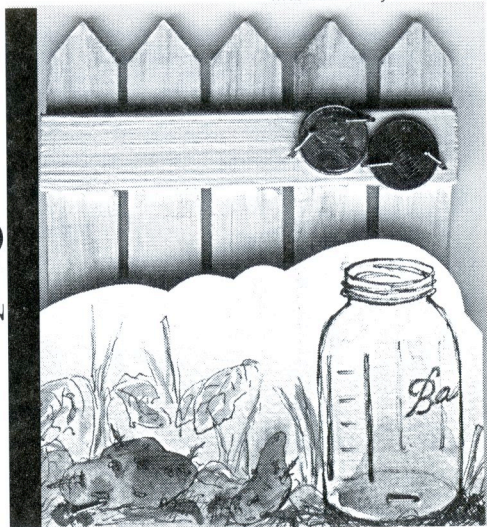
CLAY GILBERT, 25, is presently working on his Master's degree in English at Auburn University. He met his wife, Trish, over the Internet in May of 1994, and they were married on July 27 of this year. Besides his academic pursuits, he plays keyboards in an improvisational duo and is working on a novel about multiple personality disorder entitled The Ghosts That Haunt Me.



ST. BERNARD'S CATHEDRAL.JOSH SUMMERVILLE.print

TWO BUGS

C R E D I T
T A J R O U L S T O N



The old man sat on a stiff chair on the porch and sipped his tea. He stared through tea-steam into the morning sun and waited to get warm. "It takes so long to get warm now," he thought. "Father used to say, 'The work we start as boys, we finish as old men.' He could have said 'finish as cold men.' But what work? Sitting and drinking tea?"

He looked across the lawn, which was mostly dandelions, to the garden. The garden was as big as always, big enough to feed a single man through summer and fall with a few spare carrots to give the neighbors. But there weren't so many vegetables any more. Years turned them into flowers, big flowers like gladiolas and sunflowers that the old man could see from the porch. He had an appetite to tend the garden, but not much for food.

He looked through the garden row by row and admired its straightness: every year a different order but every year

straight. Except maybe a stray cucumber or squash sticking out.

At the end of the potatoes, a boy kneeled and wrote with his finger in the dirt.

"Are you nearly finished, Andrew?" called the old man.

"Yep, I'm all done!" cried Andrew. "And I got lots of them! Wait'll you see! I'm going to be rich!"

The boy picked up a jar on the ground and ran towards the old man. Halfway across the lawn he tripped on a stick and fell among dandelions and bees but was up and running before the bees got him.

"Careful, Andrew," called the old man, but, before he finished the "rew" of "Andrew," Andrew himself was standing in front of him with a peanut butter jar full of potato bugs.

"See!" said Andrew, as he thrust the bugs into the old man's hands.

"Very good, Andrew. How many are there?"

"Ninety-eight," said the boy.

"Ninety-eight! They're going to get my potatoes for sure. Last year I didn't have a french fry's worth after a whole summer's hoeing. You'll be able to buy a fifty pound bag of potatoes at the store

from the money I pay you for picking bugs, but I won't get a single potato out of the ground."

"They won't get your potatoes, Mr. Felch. I'll come every day after school and every morning on the weekends and get those bugs."

"Every couple of days is enough, Andrew. Now, how much am I supposed to pay you?"

"Two cents a bug," said Andrew.

"Two cents a bug! Wasn't it two bugs for one cent? You'll lead me to the grave potatoless and poor."

"Oh, that's right, one penny for two bugs."

"You said ninety-eight bugs, so how much do I owe you?"

"If it was two cents a bug that would be two times ninety-eight which makes one dollar ninety-six. But if it's two bugs for one cent then that's a division problem, isn't it? I'm not very good at division problems."

"Yes, it's a division problem. It's a schooling problem, really. I don't know what they teach you. It's ninety-eight divided by two.



That's forty-nine cents. Here's fifty cents— that gives me two bugs credit, right Andrew?" The old man laughed and handed him fifty cents.

"I'll see you on Tuesday, OK? There'll be a whole new crop of potato bugs by then— probably finance your college education with potato bugs."

"OK," said Andrew. "I'll be here right after school. Mr. Felch?"

"Yes, Andrew?"

"How come you don't have any kids of your own? It'd be cheaper for you— you could tell 'em to pick bugs and not pay 'em anything. My mom makes me do lots of stuff for free."

"Several reasons. First I was too young, then I was too busy, then I was too old. Kids are a lot of work. You have to feed them, clean up after them, and bail them out when they get into trouble. They don't just smile and pick bugs all of the time. My father claimed I pushed him into the grave. I didn't want anyone pushing me into the grave."

"I'm not a lot of work," said Andrew. "I never get into trouble. Really. Almost never. And I get my own cereal in the morning and I know how to make toast. My mom says I make better toast than she does!"

"Well," said the old man laughing, "You're a special kid. If I could have been assured of having you, maybe I would have had a kid after all. But I couldn't take that risk."

"Yeah," said Andrew, "there are a lot of bad kids around. You could have got stuck with Johnny Breen."

"See, I couldn't take that risk."

"Yeah, I see. I have to go now. Mom will kill me if I'm late. But I'll see you on Tuesday."

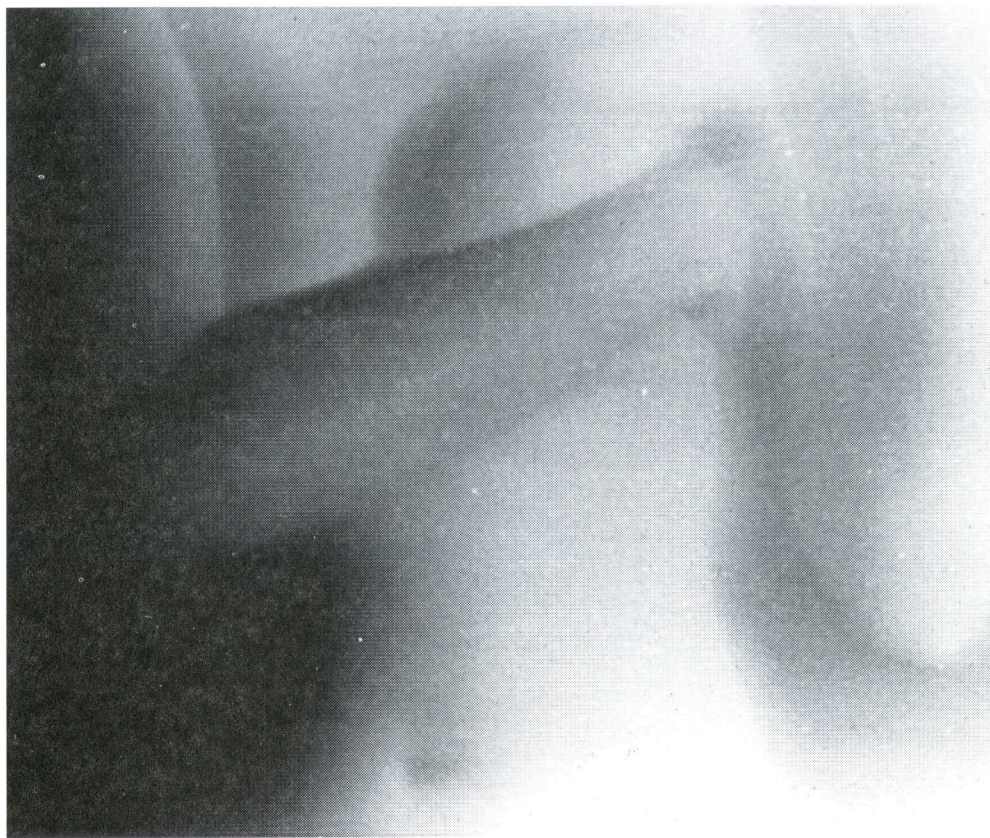
"On Tuesday," the old man said as Andrew ran down the road and disappeared around a bend.

The old man looked at the jar of potato bugs. "Better see what's left of the potatoes," he said to himself. He grabbed his hoe and, using it as a cane, hobbled toward the garden. At the edge of the potatoes he saw writing in the dirt. He walked closer and saw numbers. It was a division problem: "98/2." But it was unfinished. With the tip of his hoe the old man wrote "=49" and circled it. "Two bugs credit," he chuckled, then walked among his potatoes.

the SOUTHERN
gentleman
GENEVIEVE NATTER

Unimpressed, relentless to change,
she stands upon that threshold of pain.
The gateway to insanity.
The window to rage.
He courteously holds open the door.

GENEVIEVE NATTER was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. She's a second year Psychology major who, like many Auburn students, may change her major many times before she graduates.



HEATHER PARTIN.UNTITLED.photograph

Heather Partin is a student in the art department. She gave us a biography, but it was too boring to explain her intense personality.

RADiANCE

C A S S H E R S H

Gross misinterpretation.
That's what she said
of my analysis
of the Phosphorescent Clown.

See, I had thought
that the Clown
was a representation
of nuclear ills
or sexual afterglow,

but she said
that the clown beamed
because he was happy
and was radiating
his energy to the world.

I think I think too much,
I mean, we were only
at the circus.
I guess the teardrop
threw me off.

Cass Hersh, aged a brisk 23 years, has been going to Auburn off and on for the past five years. When the sediment of his life began to sift last fall, he found himself as an English major with aspirations of graduating sometime in the next year. Future plans include playing music on the streets of New Orleans.

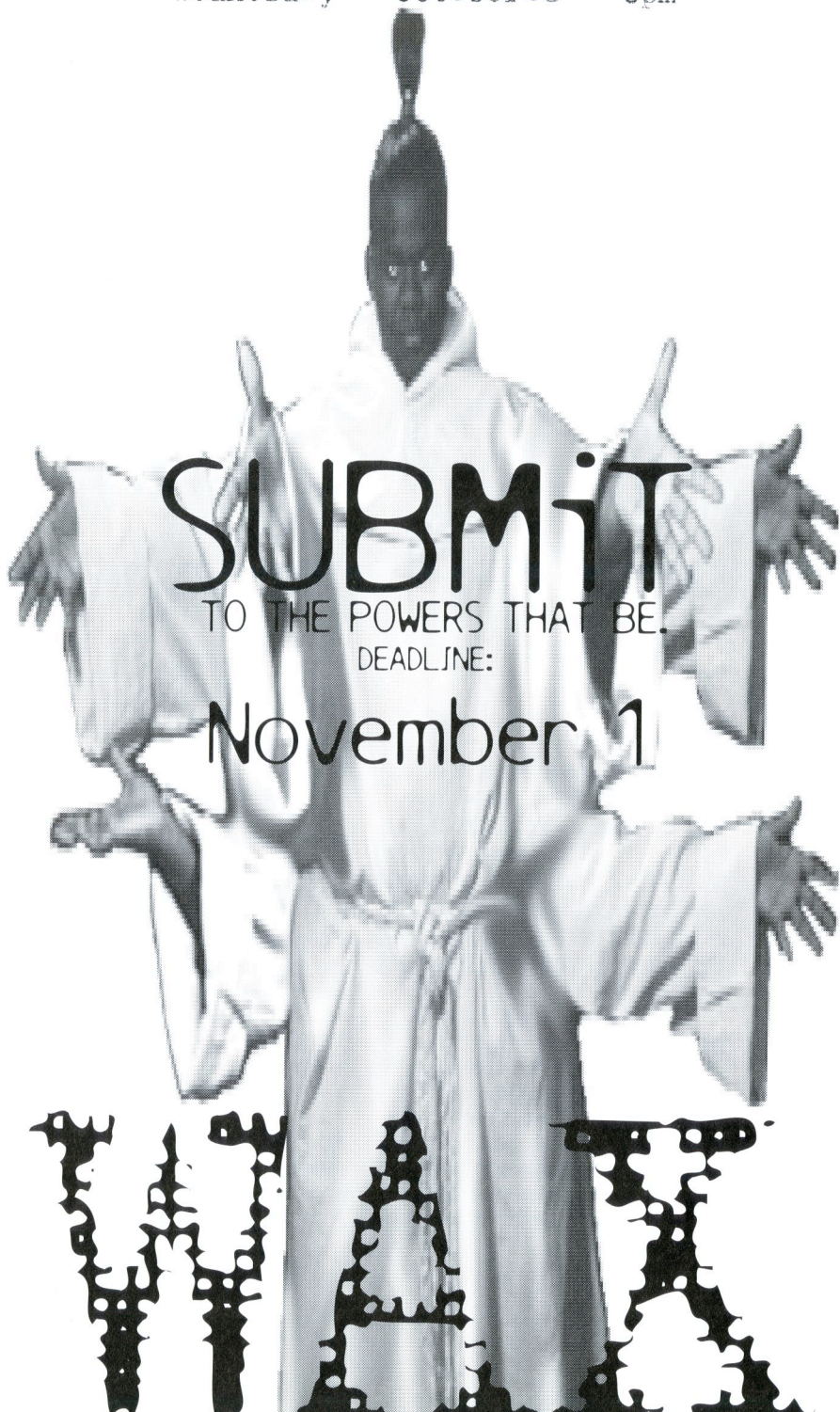
Sandalwood incense
 envelopes
 the deteriorating dorm room.
 Sid Vicious and Pink Floyd
 scowl down at me from the walls;
 combat boots and sweaty socks
 lie in a heap
 by the stereo.
 Reality is outside—
 beyond the sliding glass door and
 the
 yawning balcony.
 He sits cross-legged on the check-
 ered bedspread—
 faded plaid shirt
 swallowing his gesticulating
 hands,
 cut-off jeans revealing
 bony knees—
 and tells me about Hinduism and Kierkegaard.
 A long strand of coppery brown hair hides
 one eye.
 I lounge beside him, listening,
 but when he catches that glazed look in my eyes
 as my mind strays
 to thoughts of Monday Morning on the school bus,
 he lets the philosophical world slip back into the books
 stacked by the bed.
 I tuck my feet up underneath my faded hippie skirt,
 reach down into its pockets,
 and pull out my troubles.
 Like a child
 I show them to him one by one,
 all the little lint pieces of my life,
 and ask him what to do.
 He just
 smiles,
 takes them gently from my hands,
 and flings them out the sliding glass door.
 After all, as he says,
 isn't that what big brothers are for?

JAMiE
 ANGELA SCHMIDT

ANGELA SCHMIDT is a junior who is majoring in Language Arts so she can teach English Literature at the high school level. She played bassoon for two years in the AU Symphonic Band.

NEW STAFF MEETING

Wednesday - October 23 - 6pm



SUBMiT

TO THE POWERS THAT BE.

DEADLINE:

November 1

GOD LOVES CATS and CHILDREN

J O N D I X O N



Cat illustrations by Lisa Miller

Lilly was in the back seat of her oldest son's car, being driven home from Larry's funeral when she realized, first, that both of her living sons, sitting in the front seat, had hair growing out of their ears, and then, that she was ready.

It wasn't often that she had to make excuses for herself. "I'm old," she'd said many times to John, the oldest, and David, the middle boy. "I'm almost seventy. There ought to be a time in your life when you don't have to sell your ways to anybody." They left her alone, for the most part, allowed her a peaceful life with her forty-two

cats in a big, musty house in the middle of Nashville, and had stopped asking her about how many sherries she drank and how many cigarettes she smoked in a day. But, when Larry, the younger son, who had lived with her all of his thirty-eight years, had shot himself three days before in his bedroom at the back of the house with a pistol that he'd found in a forgotten drawer in the cellar, Lilly had begun immediately to plan her escape. Larry was simple and had done something that the simple did not do. When she found his large body curled in bed, his pillow soaked with blood, Lilly knew she'd have to lie. John and David wouldn't leave her alone in this. They would have to know why. And she was ready to tell them.

She couldn't blame them for their confusion. Her memories and many years living with Larry made sense of

his death, but these memories were things that John and David couldn't know, and couldn't be made to know. At birth Larry had been a beautiful child with a nest of black fluff on his head and blue eyes already shining, but Lilly, though she felt a little ridiculous for thinking it, remembered that even in her womb Larry was unlike the other two. John and David had struggled and kicked within her, but Larry had lay so quiet, Lilly had worried about the beating of his heart. As an infant Larry had resisted looking into her eyes, gazed blankly to some point behind her, over her shoulder or above her head, and unlike John and David, who had gone for her breasts like starved kittens, Larry had rejected her, and had to be bottle-fed. The doctor that judged Larry "slow" had tried to soothe Lilly by saying that there were many like Larry who grew up without the worries that normal folks had and that he would probably live a long, happy life. Lilly had done what she could to make that possible.

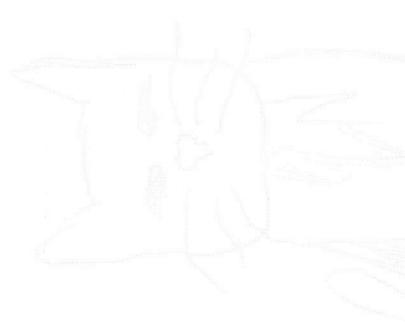
John and David, she knew, even had trouble understanding their own concerns for Larry. Their memories of him didn't begin before his birth, but on a day when Larry was twelve, when the three of them had gone swimming in a pond together and Larry had

almost drowned. "We turned our backs for only a few seconds," they told her. "When we turned around he was gone," they said. "Then we saved him," they said. That was all they could tell her.

The Larry that they saved, who didn't breathe for several minutes, was changed, was even more blank-faced than before. They must have recognized it. While their backs were turned Larry had lost everything, his voice, and even the simple abilities he'd been born with.

John and David had watched over Lilly's shoulder as she began to re-teach him, as she fed him, dressed him, taught him to speak and read again.

They loved him, as all brothers love one another and as all people love and care for the retarded, but their sadness had grown over the years, grew every time they visited Larry. David, the middle child, cried every time he saw Larry sitting alone in his room, usually cross-legged on his bed, drawing pictures of the cats that played about him. At twelve Larry had displayed an unusual artistic talent, a talent that, David had said many times, was allotted to only a few,



like Larry, who were pure because of their simplicity. The Larry that David remembered was a young, quiet, solitary boy who looked into sunsets and counted colors, then duplicated them in crayon. That Larry had been replaced, over the years, by the oversized child who sat for hours with dull eyes, eyes that seemed shaded by clouds, and drew grotesque cats which, over time, became more disfigured and ugly.

Lilly's eyes met John's in the rearview mirror.

"Mother," John said to her. "We have to talk about this."

"Let's wait 'til we get home," she said. "We'll have a drink out on the porch."

xxxx

They sat on the porch in a mild spring wind and sipped the whisky that Lilly had poured. John, in the porch swing, had taken off his jacket, loosened his tie and put his feet up. David sat on the top step and stared into the street. Lilly, thankful for the warmth of the wind and the calm from the whisky, fidgeted in her rocker and waited for them to begin. Their questions would

come soon and would be pointed. She felt corralled, and began to rehearse as she had been doing for three days.

"Mother," John finally broke the silence.

She jumped a little.

"He wasn't smart enough to be unhappy. Or to load a pistol. Hell, he had to wear Velcro shoes."

She sat quietly. Sipped whisky. Lit a cigarette.

It was true. She hadn't exactly had to dress Larry every day; she had taught him in the decade after the accident how to dress and wash himself, but she did have to run a check of him before he left the house to go to the mailbox or up the street to a clearing where he sat and watched sunsets. At least daily she had had to zip his fly or refasten the snaps on his sweater in their proper sequence. John was right about the pistol. The .22 cartridges would have been too small for Larry's uncoordinated fingers, which often fumbled even with spoons and pre-school crayons. Lilly stammered. "I don't know how he did it. I didn't even know he had the pistol. I had forgotten it was in the house."

"And I can't understand how he could have hurt himself," John continued. "I mean, look at the way he treated the cats. All little kids pull cats' tails and try to trap them in corners. But not Larry."

Lilly was glad that John had turned his attention away from the pistol. It was one of the things she couldn't explain. She

hoped he would continue.

David didn't turn around when he spoke, but continued to gaze into the street. "Didn't he give you any clues, Mother?" he asked. "For twenty five years he's been doing the same things, at the same times on a single city block. Cartoons in the morning, then the mailbox, soaps and Jeopardy, then out to watch the sun. You had to notice something different. Weren't you watching him?"

She recognized the question as one similar to the question about the number of stray cats she and Larry had accumulated. It was a test of her sanity; David could have just as well asked, "Mother, have you lost your mind?"

Of course she had noticed changes in Larry, especially over the past few weeks. But she hadn't understood them until a few days before, and was certain David would never understand. She couldn't say to David that he hadn't been close enough to see Larry's changes, or that he was wrong about Larry going about the same business every day for twenty-five years. The changes were slow, barely observable because they were drawn out over time. Only she had been there to see the boy that she had recreated into a twelve-year-old slowly degenerate, become a ten year old, then eight, then six.

It was during the latest stages, when she thought he probably had the mind of a six year old, that Larry began looking for things. His twelve-year-old mind had been content with television, drawing pictures of cats, watching the sun. When he became a six year old he wanted more, to find something unusual in the bottom of a closet or in the cellar or in some long neglected photo album. A month before she'd found him huddled in a corner surrounded by a

pile of books and cats; he couldn't read anymore, but spent an afternoon searching between hundreds of pages. She had no idea what he was looking for.

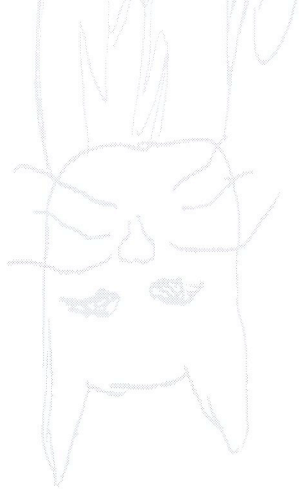
He had entered the kitchen suddenly enough to startle her.

"Mama?"

"Yes, baby?"

"Are there cats in God's house?"

Had he seen something in a book? She hadn't mentioned God to him in years. God was a memory for both of them, but Larry began to mention Sunday school often. He recalled elaborate memories of pretty teachers and tales of giants on big boats and snakes being swallowed by whales. Lilly didn't attempt to sort through his recollections and straighten them for him. He was looking for something in them, and



she hoped she wasn't fooling herself when she thought that his memories, though distorted, were becoming more clear and purposeful; God was a person hiding somewhere--his house was a destination, something else to look for in the corner of a closet.

"Of course there are cats in heaven, baby. Probably millions of them."

"Will they hiss at me?"

"No. God won't let them."

xxxx

Her tongue felt thick as she answered David and John. "No," she lied. "He didn't show any signs and didn't say anything. He was the same from beginning to end. He found the old pistol and loaded it somehow and went to his room and pulled the trigger. It was as simple as that."

John swung his feet down from the swing and put his face in his hands. "Do you think he should have come to live with one of us?" he asked through his fingers. "Mother, the house is gloomy and damp. Maybe he should have..."

"No," Lilly interrupted. "He was happy here with me. Don't think the house had anything to do with it. He had lots of places to play, and you know how he felt about the cats."

"The cats worry me, Ma," David broke in. "There's gotta be thirty of them, and the house smells like hell. It can't be good for you."

She couldn't tell him that there were forty-two cats. Larry had brought home four more the week before his death. She did want to defend herself against David's assumption that the cats were hers, that she had wanted to keep them for herself. They were Larry's. He needed them. As he passed from room to room in the house he forgot what was behind him and with each room filled, she wanted to explain, with a cat on every chair and shelf, Larry could look forward, and never walk into a lonely room. He showed no sign of understanding that the cats in a room in front of him were different from those that he'd just left

behind, even though they were of a variety of sizes and colors, and he only had a few names for them. But he was afraid of many things and was often unhappy, though John and David would laugh at her for thinking it, and the cats, each new bunch that gathered about him in each new room that he entered, calmed him. She didn't know how long Larry would have lasted without them. Taking away one cat would have been taking away a piece of his life. Lilly had explained this to John and David before, but now she was silent.



Cats, some long dead, had been part of Larry's therapy after the accident at the pond. Many of his first new words were spoken, not to Lilly, but to Lion, an old tabby. After he'd advanced a little, Lilly gave Larry pencils and paper and with unsteady hands he had drawn hundreds of pictures of cats. His bedroom wall was still covered with his early drawings. She was sure that the boys would want them to come down, at least the ones that were speckled with blood, but she would leave them. They showed Larry's growth, and finally, the absence of it. After a few years, pencil sketches of cats had been replaced by crayon drawings, then squares and circles, and finally Larry stopped drawing, altogether.

"I think most

of the cats won't stay around long," Lilly offered. "They were his. I only want to keep one."

"Lion," they both whispered.

"Yes, she should stay. She was his favorite. She followed him around the house until the end."

Probably the offspring of the original Lion, the kitten had been beside Larry when he found the pistol in the cellar. The two had bolted up the stairs together, and the kitten was rubbing against his leg when he pointed the weapon toward the ceiling and exclaimed, "Look what we found, Mama! Just like on T.V.!"

Her first thought was to take it from him, but he held it with such pride, and she thought that, strangely, he looked twelve again. His face was boyish and smooth, his eyes were clear blue. She could only take it from him, shake out the two cartridges that were inside, and give it back to him.

"C'mon, Lion," he said, stooping to scoop up the little cat. "We really found something." He clumped down the hall with Lion under his arm and went into his bedroom. Hours later he emerged, smiling, waving a drawing in the air.

"Look at this picture, Mama."

It was an elaborate pencil sketch

of the pistol. "Larry, that's so nice. I want to hang it up right away. She crossed the kitchen and got a thumbtack. "Why did you want to draw it in pencil, baby?" she asked across the room.

"Cause that's what smart people draw with."

They walked to his room, close to each other, Larry's big hand resting on Lilly's shoulder. Lilly looked up in his face, pinched with happiness. "Where do you want to hang it, baby?"

"Beside the good one of Lion," he answered, pointing to a brittle picture drawn many years before.

She flattened the creases out of the new sketch and tacked it over several other drawings. "Yes, that's nice."

Larry stared at his work. "Mama, if I went to God's house, would you come and visit me?"

The suddenness of the words frightened her, but she knew that the idea was an old one, that he had been discovering it for much longer than she could imagine.

xxxx

Lilly put on a sweater after the sun went down. John had fallen asleep in the porch swing, but David sat in the window sill where light shone through from a lamp inside. Lilly saw that he was crying.

"Mother, is there anything we could have done?" he asked, wiping his eyes. "Maybe he would have been happier in a home or something."

Lilly began to cry a little herself. If she could have made David understand why she had cleaned the pistol while Larry was out watching the sun, she would have. If she thought he would understand why Larry had watched her with such great attention, one night, when she had put cartridges into the gun and pressed back on its hammer, she would have explained, if only to make him stop crying at that moment. He would feel, she thought, as she did, that there are no words for a mother's love and that when she had forgotten, left the loaded pistol on the kitchen table and left the house for an hour, what was done was unexplainable and best kept silent. If she could make him see the difference between pencil and crayon, between drawing and searching, between watching sunsets and finding God, he would see that the thirty-eight year old child that they had buried in the spring sunlight had died long ago in a pond, she would have told him everything.

But that was the talk of a crazy old woman with a house full of cats, and might seem impractical. She lit a cigarette and said nothing.

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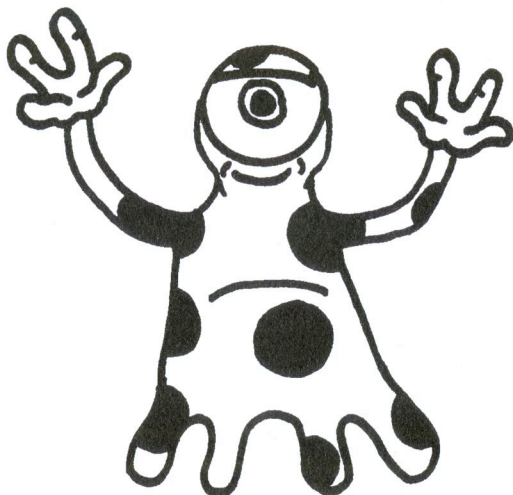
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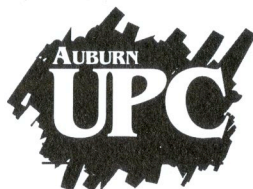
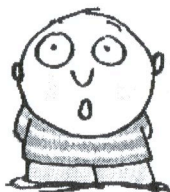


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